

# A Bad Encounter With a Big

*By YN1 David Kreider*

I was working in my office at Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Nine, Point Mugu. Suddenly, a young airman burst into the maintenance office screaming, “Call 911, call 911! An airman was run over by Vandy 13.” I yelled at the AZ3 sitting at the desk to call an ambulance right away, and I dashed out to the ramp with a half-dozen other people. We immediately knew the seriousness of what had happened.

When I arrived on the flight line, I could see Vandy 13 was stopped, and it was hooked to a tow tractor. A circle of 10 to 12 people stood underneath the starboard wing. As I got closer, I could see the airman’s face. She was screaming from the pain. Two people were holding her shoulders, and a chief was bent over looking at her leg.

Shortly after I arrived, she stopped screaming, but her body went stiff, and her eyes rolled back into her head. Someone shouted, “She’s going into shock!”

I looked toward her foot and saw nothing but a pile of leather (what was left of her boot), flesh, bone, and blood. The chief had removed his belt and had applied a tourniquet to her leg just below the knee. Although it was only minutes before the paramedics arrived, it seemed like hours.

The airman had not slept well the night before because she was homesick and worried about her plane-captain test, which was scheduled for later that week. During the pre-movement safety brief, she admittedly wasn’t listening because her mind was on other things, and she was sleepy.

During the move, she was the starboard wing walker (a task she had done several times before), and she didn’t think there was much to worry about. As the plane moved, she started walking closer and closer to the airplane. She couldn’t remember exactly what she was thinking about but admits to daydreaming and not really paying attention.

The director yelled at her to move away from the plane, but she couldn’t hear him. It was very noisy on the flight line that day, and everyone was wearing hearing protection. Again, he shouted at her to move away, but she now was dangerously close to the plane. Finally, in an attempt to get her attention, the director blew his whistle to stop the plane. The tow-tractor driver immediately stopped, as did everyone else, including the airman. She turned to see why the whistle had blown and could see the PC yelling at her, but she didn’t understand what he was saying.

At that moment, the tractor driver relaxed his pressure on the brake. Even though he released it just




# Airplane

a little bit, the F-14D rolled backward and over the front half of the airman's right foot. She immediately clutched her leg and began screaming. The tractor driver slammed on the gas and the aircraft lunged forward while an observer and a chief rushed to pull her away from the plane. The chief yelled at an airman to call 911, and he began to administer first aid.

The plane completely crushed all the bones from the middle of her foot to her toes. She was taken to Ventura Hospital, then airlifted to Los Angeles' Cedar Sinai. She was in surgery for nine hours as doctors attempted to save her foot by reconstructing her bones, reattaching veins and arteries, and salvaging as much

skin as possible. They tried valiantly to save the foot, but, after 10 days, it was amputated. The airman was 19 years old.

The squadron tried to decide what could have been done to prevent this accident. A detailed safety brief was done before the move, and all personnel were wearing cranials, goggles and sound attenuators. Perhaps the aircraft could have been stopped sooner, or the tractor driver could have kept his foot firmly against the brake. But even with these mistakes, the mishap would not have happened if the airman had paid attention to what she was doing on the flight line. 

Petty Officer Kreider currently works with Supply Support Battalion One, Mobile Mail Company. He worked with VX-9 at the time of the incident.

*I remember this incident because I did a maintenance malpractice presentation for VX-9 at China Lake, Calif., just one week before this mishap. The commanding officer wanted me to give the presentation to his Sailors at Point Mugu, but I couldn't do it. I had left a Naval Safety Center survey in Dallas, Texas, flown to China Lake, given the MMP, and had gone back to the airport to catch a return flight to Dallas. I told the CO we might be able to do another MMP at a later date.*

*One week later, I read the mishap report and, shortly after, received a call from the squadron telling me it was a shame I couldn't have made the trip to Point Mugu because the MMP spoke of this very hazard.*

*The "book" says never to put yourself in front of the tires and to avoid "headknockers" or things that can hit you and knock you into the path of the tires. I don't know if an MMP would have helped in this case, but I thought about the circumstances surrounding this mishap for months, and now I get to relive them.—Ed.*



Photograph by Matthew J. Thomas